

Glowing Tribute Paid Old Kentucky

Response to Toast, "To Kentucky", by *Sam P. Cochran, at Dallas Rotary Club, February 11, 1925, and at Kentucky Club of Dallas, Annual Meeting, March 5, 1932

"Kentucky"

*"The sun never shone on a country more fair
Than beautiful, peerless Kentucky;
There's life in a kiss of her rarified air,
Kentucky, prolific Kentucky.
Her sons are valiant and noble and bright,
Her beautiful daughters are just about right.
And the babies—God bless them!—are clear
out of sight;
THAT crop never fails in Kentucky.*

—BEN L. COX.

THE close of the American Revolution turned loose a body of strong men who had demonstrated courage and learned endurance during the trying experiences of that war, and were imbued with a spirit of adventure and, above all, of patriotic loyalty. Home ties had been severed, and in many instances local associations obliterated so that the glowing accounts of a wonderful land beyond the mountains readily led many to seek new habitations and try for fortunes in the unknown West. Puritan from New England, Catholic from Maryland, Scotch Irish from New York, with sturdy Dutch and Quaker from Pennsylvania, the Cavalier of Virginia and the explorer from North Carolina pressed up the valleys of the streams flowing to the Atlantic seaboard, crossed the Blue Ridge and through the passes of the Appalachians, and down into the fertile valleys and rich forests and tablelands of the Mid-west. The explorations of Boone and Kenton attracted many of these to Kentucky, which lay in the natural pathway between the seaboard and the Mississippi River. Many of those who crossed the Blue Ridge stopped in the foothills of Eastern Kentucky, and finding it a congenial country planted themselves there, and their descendants, a hardy race, are still there, preserving many of the traditions and peculiarities of speech of their ancestors, reaching back even to Mother Countries beyond the Atlantic. Others came down the Ohio River and pressed forward through the forest to the tablelands of Central Kentucky and on to the meadows of the West, and from these varying and differing peoples sprang up a race of fearless men and peerless women. The spirit of the Revolution made them intensely loyal to state and country. The dangers of the wild beast and more savage men, who had to be overcome to gain and retain possession of the goodly land they sought, preserved the innate courage of the pioneers and their descendants. The necessity of individual defense and family protection bred the spirit of personal independence, and the fellowship of danger generated the sentiment of neighborliness, which gave birth, in gentler times, to that distinguished trait, "Kentucky Hospitality." The courage of the women in sharing the trials of pioneership with their fathers, brothers and husbands made a race of women, who, with the advent of peaceful times and the comforts of prosperity, developed into a race unrivaled for beauty and unsurpassed for culture, virtue and grace.

From these various elements of race, circumstances and conditions developed those distinctive classes, which I have facetiously but lovingly denominated "The Kentulians" and "The Benjolians"—the "Kentulians," those

hardy men and women of the middle class, not rich in material wealth, but great in courage, with strong sense of right and justice, truly loyal to state and nation, of moderate or even poor educational attainments, with unyielding personal integrity and family devotion; on the other hand, the "Benjolians," men and women of wealth without degeneracy, of culture without superciliousness, of patriotism above pleasure, and the refinements and graces of social excellence without haughtiness, with a love of state and country making for any sacrifice or service; in other words, the Hampdens of the Hills and the Lafayettes of the Meadowlands, a people of improbable possibilities and of extravagant virtues, of innate courtesy and superabundant sensitiveness and resentment. These two distinct yet coalescing classes of people have been most graphically delineated by those two greatest of Kentucky's literary geniuses of the last generation, James Lane Allen in his brilliant, classical love stories and descriptions of "The Blue Grass," and John Fox, Jr., in his laconic and pathetic tales of "The People of the Hills." Of these people Dr. Harvey W. Wiley wrote: "Those Highlanders are not degenerates. On the contrary they are the best human specimens to be found in the country, and probably in the world. They are the last remnants of the undefiled." And Woodrow Wilson said, "In these mountains is the original stuff of which America is made." Such seeming contradictions of character have led to many humorous and some censorious criticisms and comments on Kentucky and the Kentuckians, especially with relation to their feuds and the moonshining proclivities of the Mountaineer, the love of the race horse and the adoration of their women, and the disposition on occasions to take the law into their own hands and settle their internal and private disputes with the pistol, the rifle or the knife. This custom, it is pleasing to say, is losing some of its popularity. Friends from the outside have sometimes seen the virtues and frailties of the people in clearer light than those within, and have framed them in pictures for our view, sometimes humorous, sometimes pleasing, nearly always instructive. A friend from Chicago once furnished this "Diagnosis of Kentucky":

*"Kentucky's hills are full of rills,
And all the rills are lined with stills,
And all the stills are full of gills,
And all the gills are full of thrills,
And all the thrills are full of kills."*

*You see the feudist dot the hills,
And camp among the little rills,
Convenient to the little stills,
And thirsting for the brimming gills;
And when the juice his system fills,
Each feudist whoops around and kills.*

*Now, if they'd only stop the stills
They'd cure Kentucky's many ills,
Men would be spared to climb the hills
And operate the little stills
That linger on the little rills,
And manufacture gills and thrills.*